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WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

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WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

BY

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WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY?

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I.

WHAT is Philosophy? I will answer this question, tentatively and provisionally, by defining Philosophy as *a search for ultimate truth.* This definition will not carry me very far until I have defined the word *truth;* but of all words this is perhaps the least definable, the range of the corresponding idea being as wide and the meaning as deep as the Universe. What is truth? *The objective side of knowledge* is one answer to this audacious question. *The subjective side of reality* is another. But what is *knowledge* and what is *reality*, and in what sense can truth be said to mediate between these two conceptions? Are we in possession of truth

when our knowledge is clear, accurate, and certain, when we can say of a thing with absolute confidence "This is so"? If this is what we mean by truth, then it is incontestable that mathematical truth is truth of the very highest order. But what of the subject-matter of mathematical science? Are the things which the mathematician knows so clearly, so accurately, and so certainly, real things? Now, if feeling be at once the product and the proof of experience, and if by experience we mean contact with reality, we may perhaps conclude that the most real things are the things that awake in us the most intense and exalted emotion; and inasmuch as our attitude towards the objects of mathematical study is wholly unemotional, we may perhaps go on to conclude that the things which the mathematician knows so perfectly are of all things the least real. Here, then, in Pure Mathematics, our knowledge is of the very highest order, but the

things that are known seem to have the very minimum of reality. In other words, mathematical truth is of all forms of truth the highest in degree and the lowest in kind; the highest in respect of accuracy and certainty, the lowest in respect of the reality of its objective counterpart. As we pass from the abstractions of mathematics to the concrete phenomena of material nature, from these to the complex phenomena of life, and from these to the more spiritual phenomena which are the objects of poetic and religious emotion, our knowledge of the things that surround us becomes less and less certain and accurate, but the things themselves become proportionately more and more real, if the strength and vividness of the feelings that they generate may be accepted as proofs of their reality. At last we seem to approach the confines of a region in which knowledge (in the scientific sense of the word) is non-existent, but the things which we seek to

know are supremely real. If truth is to be found in that region, it is, of all forms of truth, the lowest in degree but the highest in kind—the lowest in respect of accuracy and certainty, the highest in respect of the reality of its objective counterpart.

What then is truth? The objective side of knowledge. The subjective side of reality. But what is most knowable is least real, and what is most real is least knowable. Perhaps we may infer from these data that truth is of two kinds, or rather that it ranges between two opposite and infinitely distant poles. At one of these poles we have the exact truth *about* things—the truth which is the counterpart of perfect knowledge. At the other, we have the inmost truth *of* things—the truth which is the counterpart of absolute reality. Speaking generally, it may be said that when we try to discover the truth about things, we separate ourselves as fully as it is possible for us to do—separate ourselves provision-

ally and hypothetically, if not really—from the objects of our experience, with the result that our attitude towards them is cold, unemotional, impersonal, impartial, disinterested; whereas, when we try to discover the truth of things, we identify ourselves as closely as it is possible for us to do with the objects of our experience, with the result that our attitude towards them is warm, emotional, personal, partial (with something of the partiality that we feel for ourselves) interested (with something of the interest that we take in ourselves). To discover and expound the truth about things is obviously the function of Science. To realize and express the truth of things is obviously the function of Poetry.

Where then does Philosophy come in?

Let us first distinguish it from Science. In Science we arrive at certainty, the certainty which enables us to say with perfect confidence, with imperturbable peace of mind,

"I know that this is so." One of the sources of our certainty and one of the proofs of its validity is the feeling that it is shared by all who have gone as fully into the matter as we have. In Philosophy we never get within measurable distance of certainty of this kind. Men have been philosophizing for thousands of years, and so far as tangible results are concerned they have as yet achieved exactly nothing. Were I to ask a question in Chemistry, I should in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred receive the same answer from every professional chemist. But the doctors of Philosophy do not seem to have made up their minds on a single point. They have no primer or catechism to place in the hands of their novices, no principle or axiom which they can affirm to be incontestably true. The outsider need not be initiated into the mysteries of Philosophy in order to see that disorder and anarchy are its leading characteristics. The din of intestine strife is almost

the only sound that escapes from its camp into the outer world. If a house be divided against itself, how shall it stand? The history of Philosophy is the history of endless civil wars and revolutions, the history of a chaos on which order has not yet begun to dawn. Systems of thought that flourish in one age are either anathematized or ignored in the next. Rival systems, so far as they pretend to be scientific, are mutually destructive; and each age in turn is the scene of a new conflict. Nay, the very platform on which the different schools meet and wrangle, changes from age to age. The arena which was wide enough for the combatants of one century is too narrow for those of another. Problems that perplexed the minds and agitated the hearts of our forefathers seem trivial or meaningless to the thinkers of to-day. Assumptions that seem to-day to provide a solid basis of controversy will be rejected to-morrow as hollow and unsound. All is in

flux. Nothing is fixed or certain. What Chillingworth said of the Church of Rome applies with tenfold force to Philosophy: "There are popes against popes, councils against councils, some fathers against other fathers, the same fathers against themselves, a consent of fathers of one age against a consent of fathers of another age, the Church of one age against the Church of another age."

I admit that Science too has its unsolved problems, its doubtful points, its controversies, its changes not merely of opinion but even of authoritative teaching. To speak of it as progressive is to take such characteristics as these for granted. But Science is a sphere (unlike those which glide through space) whose surface may be molten or even nebulous, yet which has none the less a solid centre of truth. And as what is nebulous becomes molten, and what is molten gradually cools and solidifies, the hard inward core of accepted truth gains both in size and den-

sity. The sphere of Philosophy, on the other hand, nebulous at the surface, is incandescent to the very centre.

That individual philosophers have prodigious confidence in themselves and their theories is indeed undeniable; but the acerbity with which they maintain their opinions shows that their minds are really corroded with secret doubt. The *odium philosophicum* is scarcely less virulent than the *odium theologicum;* and anger is always a storm-signal, a proof of mental agitation, not of mental repose. Perfect certitude is always calm and cold. No one would dream of being angry with the harmless lunatics who maintain that the surface of the earth is flat. In the borderland of Science there is no doubt much heat and pugnacity; but in the regions over which Science has fully established its authority, there is a perpetual Pax Romana, an atmosphere of inviolable calm.

The reason why Science is able to

arrive at certainty is that it starts from certainty; and the reason why it is able to start from certainty is that the sphere of its work is one in which the separation, the provisional and hypothetical separation, of subject from object is complete, the result of this being that no cloud of personality obtrudes itself between the mind and the things that it studies. To examine the foundations of mathematical certitude would involve me in a long and probably futile digression; but, speaking generally, it may be said that the data with which Science deals are furnished by the bodily senses—perceptive faculties which are equally developed (within certain undefinable limits) in all sane and healthy persons, and which therefore operate alike, or with differences which can easily be corrected, in all who use them. (When I say this, I am thinking less of the individual senses than of their concerted action). It stands to reason that if the senses operated differently in different

persons, if they conveyed even slightly different messages to different minds, something of self—of the individual self—would enter into every act of perception, with the result that the distinction between subject and object would begin to break down, and the atmosphere through which things are discerned, instead of being perfectly clear and calm, would become cloudy and electrical,—a condition of things which is always incompatible with certainty and fatal to serenity of mind. It is the universal element in sense-perception which makes the foundations of Science so sure, and the materials with which it builds so solid and strong.

The connexion between universality and certainty may, of course, be looked at from a somewhat different point of view. The fact that a perceptive faculty is "constant and common, shared by all and perpetual in all," shows that it is *natural* (in the fullest sense of the word); and the naturalness of a percep-

tive faculty is a sufficient guarantee (sufficient *de facto* as well as *de jure*) of its trustworthiness. What it is my nature to perceive that I do and must perceive. The ruling of Nature, once it has been clearly defined, is decisive and irreversible,—and that for the plain reason that there is no higher Court of Appeal. *ὁ δ' ἀναιρῶν ταύτην τὴν πίστιν οὐ πάνυ πιστότερα ἐρεῖ.* The loneliest of specialists is armed, while he conducts his delicate and recondite investigations, with the full authority of Nature; and in virtue of this he may fairly claim to be the Plenipotentiary and High Commissioner of Humanity in the petty domain which he is content to explore.

But whichever view we may take of the connexion between universality and certainty, we must not fail to remind ourselves that universality may be and sometimes is purely potential, and that therefore there might be cases in which certitude would be legitimate even though one were alone, or almost alone,

against the world. For example, it is quite conceivable that there are perceptive faculties latent in all of us—clairvoyant senses, let us call them—which some men have brought, or at any rate might bring, to maturity: and it is quite conceivable that reason, or perhaps some higher development of reason, dealing with the data of these senses, as the scientist's reasoning faculties deal with the data of the bodily senses, might arrive at scientific truths as real and as incontestable as those of physical science, but immeasurably larger and deeper. These clairvoyant senses would operate alike in all who were able to use them, and for the rest of mankind they and the things that they revealed would simply not exist. Therefore for those who could use such senses, the provisional separation of subject from object would be complete, and no cloud of personality (in the narrower sense of the word) would disturb the clear and calm atmosphere through

which the mind perceived the objects of its thought. And so our clairvoyant investigator, feeling sure that all who had actualized their higher senses saw things exactly as he saw them, would rightly feel certain both of his facts and of his conclusions; and with him, as with the physicist, certitude would find its counterpart in serenity of mind. The truths which he might discover, if taught to ordinary men, would seem to be worse than foolishness, and would probably irritate those who heard them to the verge of madness; but he would no more dream of being angry with his fellow-men for not seeing what he saw and knowing what he knew, than you or I would dream of being angry with the blind for not possessing the use of their eyes.

As in Philosophy there is neither certainty nor serenity, we may fairly conclude that the sphere of its work is one in which the (provisional) distinction between subject

and object breaks down more or less completely; and as a reason for this we may perhaps conjecture that the great matters in which Philosophy exercises itself cannot be contemplated without emotion, and that as our emotional senses, though actually existent in all men, are differently developed in different persons and convey different messages to different minds, the atmosphere through which things are seen in Philosophy must needs be heavily charged with the electrical clouds of individuality,—clouds which make clearness of vision and serenity of mind alike impossible. I will presently go into this question more fully. Meanwhile, if we are to warn Philosophy off the domain of Science, we must also warn Science not to usurp the functions of Philosophy. Men of Science sometimes talk as if Science had an official philosophy and even an official creed. This is a pure delusion. Science, as such, has no philosophy and no

creed. If men of science are interested in philosophy, they are interested in it, not as men of science, but as men. The connection between scientific study and philosophical bias is always accidental, not essential. What we habitually do no doubt reacts on what we are, and what we are determines what we believe and think. But Science, as such, is no more responsible for the philosophy of the scientist than is Art, as such, for the philosophy of the artist, or Commerce, as such, for the philosophy of the merchant. Science (as we understand the word) works on a particular plane of existence, the physical plane, the plane which is revealed to us, or at any rate opened up to us by our bodily senses. Of this plane only a part, perhaps only a small fraction, has been fully surveyed. Beyond the ever advancing limits of this explored region lies a world which as yet is either wholly unknown or has only just begun to be explored. Potentially this

unknown world belongs to Science, not to Philosophy. Whenever Science discovers a new island or a new continent on the surface of its own sphere of work, it is but right that it should regard this unexplored land as its own, that it should plant its flag on its shores, and warn off all possible intruders. But beyond and above the physical plane (the frontiers of which are, of course, undefinable), beyond and above the certainties of Science, beyond and above its infinite potentialities of certainty, stretches the rest of the Universe (I am using the word in its very widest and freest sense); and in this larger world, where certainty is unattainable in the present stage of our mental development, speculation is permissible, and Philosophy is in possession, though not necessarily in sole or in permanent possession, of the field of thought. Even the clairvoyant scientist, though it might be his lot to explore some of the very regions in which Philosophy is now working,

would not be a Philosopher. The results of his labours would be Science—Science incomparably larger, loftier, and deeper than anything that we can dream of—but still Science, not Philosophy. Many of the problems that at present exercise the thoughts of philosophers might find their solution in his teaching; but in the act of being solved they would cease to belong to Philosophy and would be transferred to the domain of Science. It is indeed conceivable that, with the further development of human nature, Science will be able to advance from the physical to higher planes of existence; and that, as it advances, Philosophy will retire before it, abandoning fields of thought through which it is at present free to range. But it may safely be predicted that Philosophy will never lack its own appropriate sphere of work. The great ideas that underlie Science, the great ideas that govern it, the great ideas that emerge from its

teaching, all belong, *as ideas*, not to Science but to Philosophy. It is a truism to say that all knowledge implies the unknowable; that all proof implies the unprovable; that all definition implies the undefinable; that success, achievement, whatever form it may take, is always made possible by an environing atmosphere of failure. It follows that, wherever there is Science, there is room and there is need for Philosophy,—for a philosophy which shall underlie Science, and interpenetrate it and overarch it. I say this, not with any immediate intention of defining the sphere of Philosophy, but only in order to show that the sphere of Science, though infinite in one sense, is limited in others, and that Science cannot overpass those limits without foregoing its privileges and advantages, and eventually losing its identity. That there is a debatable land between Science and Philosophy—a land in which the two authorities dispute for mastery—is undenia-

bly true; but this does not alter the fact that each has its own appropriate sphere of work, a sphere in which its essential characteristics are exhibited clearly and fully, a sphere which is wholly its own, and from which it has a right to warn off the other.

Let us next distinguish Philosophy from Poetry. The *aim* of Philosophy is, in the last resort, scientific. The Thinker tries to separate himself from the objects of his thought, tries to study them coldly, impersonally, dispassionately, in order that he may get to know the truth *about* them, in order that he may form conceptions of them or frame theories about them which shall be intrinsically and unconditionally true. The Poet, on the other hand, tries to know the truth *of* things by becoming one with them, by merging his being in theirs. The imaginative sympathy which enables him, in some sort and some measure, to become one with things, gives him insight into their vital and

essential properties; and as his insight reacts upon and intensifies his sympathy, the time comes at last when his kindled emotion overflows of its own accord into impassioned speech. Those to whom his words appeal are able to some extent to share his inward experiences, until at last they are admitted, through the magic of his song, into the truth, the inner truth, of the things which it is his mission to interpret. To these persons he is able to say, "I have been one, if only for a moment, with the things which I sing of, and having shared their identity, I can tell you what they really are." But far from imagining that his account of things is true for all men, he knows perfectly well that it is only true for those who are able to feel what he has felt. In other words, his attitude towards things is in the highest degree personal and emotional. With abstract truth, the truth *about* things, truth which is intrinsically valid whether men accept it or not, he

does not concern himself in the slightest degree.

The Thinker then differs from the Poet in that he tries, not to know things, but to know the truth about them; whereas he differs from the Scientist in that he tries to know the truth about things which are not knowable, in the scientific sense of the word. Or let us put the matter thus:—The Poet tries to know the inmost truth of things: the Scientist tries to know all about the appearances of things: the Thinker tries to know all about the inmost truth (or inmost essence) of things.

Again, the Thinker differs from the Poet in that he tries to separate himself from the objects of his thought and to deal with them impersonally and disinterestedly; whereas he differs from the Scientist in that his personality inevitably obtrudes itself between his mind and the objects of his thought. Or, to put the matter more concisely:—in Science

personality is nothing; in Poetry personality is everything; in Philosophy personality is ever striving, consciously striving, to become impersonal.

Here we come to what is, I think, really differential in Philosophy. The chief, perhaps the final, reason why the things in which the Thinker exercises himself are too high and too deep for him, is that his personality does and must obtrude itself between him and them; or rather because the objects of his thought interpenetrate and transfigure his personality, because they constitute his true self, because they are the breath of his inner being and the life of his inmost soul. The truth is that, in conceiving of the Universe as external to himself, he necessarily relinquishes it to Science,—the physical plane to physical science, the superphysical planes (if such there be) to superphysical sciences: for to externalize the Universe is to postulate the validity of the distinction between subject

and object; in other words, it is to imply that all existent things are cognizable by perceptive faculties akin or at least analogous to those with which we cognize the material world; and it is in the data of such faculties that Science finds and will always find its appropriate materials. Thus in trying to become impersonal, in trying to separate himself from the realities which he seeks to explore, the Thinker is compelled to invade the domain—actual or potential—of Science; and being rightly expelled from that domain as an intruder (for Science may fairly say to Philosophy, "If the world is really external to the mind, it is for me to explore it, not for you"), he has no choice but to return to his starting point and re-discover the Universe in himself. And so, while he is trying (in perfect good faith) to solve the great problems that perplex him, and perhaps flattering himself (also in perfect good faith) that he is making "first-rate metaphysical disco-

veries" (to quote the grotesque words of a thinker who lacked the saving grace of humour), he is really engaged in communing with his own soul and in striving to wrest from it the secrets of its inner life.

II.

Let us now try to make our way to the fountain-head of Philosophy. As truth ranges between the antipodal poles of the scientific and the poetic ideals, so does knowledge range between the antipodal poles of clear conscious apprehension and blind instinctive groping,—the latter a kind of knowing which, in the last resort, is scarcely distinguishable from mere being. Examples in illustration and support of this conception of knowledge are ready, in plenty, to one's hand. It will suffice if I contrast the knowledge that a mathematician has of the properties of a triangle, or a chemist of the properties of oxygen, with the knowledge that I have of the soul of a dear and intimate friend. Close, subtle, penetrative, sympathetic, the latter kind of knowledge belongs to a region which

is but faintly illuminated by the light of consciousness. That it is real knowledge is proved by the fact that it enables me to find my way through the most complicated of all mazes, to solve correctly the most delicate and difficult of all practical problems. That it is in large measure blind, instinctive, and implicit is proved by the fact that only a small fraction of it admits of being formulated or even of being informally presented to my consciousness. I cannot explain to myself, still less can I explain to a bystander, why, in such and such a case, I act towards my friend in such and such a way. But my love of my friend and the insight that love gives me into his character, enables my buried self to make profound and elaborate calculations as to the relative values of various possible courses of action,—calculations which, when I apply them to the solution of the concrete problems that perplex me, I find to have been correctly made. This example

shows that there is, as Diotima suggests, an intermediate state, or rather many intermediate states, between *σόφια* and *ἀμάθια*, between perfect knowledge and blank ignorance. And this is what we have every reason to expect. For, after all, the range of knowledge between the poles of consciousness and unconsciousness is but one aspect, one among many, of the general range of human nature. The idea of the *buried life*, of the *vie profonde*, of the *subliminal self*, the idea that we are what we really are, not what we seem to be, that we think what we really think, not what we say we think, that we believe what we really believe, not what we profess to believe,—has of late years won many adherents and may fairly claim to have rooted itself in human thought. The idea is in the highest degree suggestive and illuminative, but we must be on our guard against misinterpreting it. The personality of man —of each individual man—has been likened

to an iceberg, which rises high above the sea in which it floats, though by far the larger part of it is submerged and invisible. This simile is, I think, misleadingly dualistic. The movements of Nature are, as a rule, continuous rather than spasmodic. To say that man's life is either immersed in the darkness of mere being, or exposed, like an iceberg glittering in the sunshine, to the full light of consciousness, is to go back to that crude psychology from which the conception of the sub-conscious self is designed to deliver us. Reasoning from analogy, one may surely surmise that the dawn of consciousness on the life of man is and has ever been as gradual and indeterminable as the approach of daylight, in our northern latitudes, at the close of a summer night.

To this general conception (which we may, perhaps, accept as a working hypothesis) there are certain obvious corollaries. The first is that unconscious apprehension is

prior in time to conscious knowledge and is at any given moment working in advance of it. That man acts, feels, and perceives before he thinks; that instinct is in the field before reason; that genius works ahead of intelligence; that knowledge must exist before one can become aware of its presence; that intuition must prepare the way for inference; that the yarn of experience must be spun before it can be woven;—all these are self-evident truths which hold good of the individual life not less than of the life of collective Humanity.

The second corollary is an obvious extension of the first. As the unconscious (or sub-conscious) side of one is ever working ahead of one's consciousness, it is also (unless indeed growth and progress are retrograde movements) ever dealing with higher realities, and ever nearer to the truth of things. I am expressing the same idea in other words when I say that conscious appre-

hension of a truth implies unconscious (or sub-conscious) apprehension of a higher and wider truth. Thus consciously to apprehend a fact is unconsciously to apprehend a law. Consciously to pass an isolated judgment is unconsciously to apprehend and apply a principle. Consciously to determine on and do a noble action is unconsciously to grasp and cleave to a spiritual idea. But the law is higher than the fact. The principle is higher than the judgment. The idea is higher than the impulse to action.

The third corollary is scarcely more than a restatement of the second. To say that the sub-conscious self is at any given moment dealing with higher realities than those which present themselves to one's consciousness is to imply that the true life of man is buried; that the true self is a hidden self; that the higher side of man's being, the side that is conversant with Nature's inner mysteries, lives and works for the most part in the

darkness of the unconscious life. In support of this thesis I will content myself with naming two words, *inspiration* and *genius*. The beliefs and conceptions that centre in these words are so widely spread and so persistent, that experience—the collective experience of the race—alone could have generated them; and it is clear that if they are to find a natural explanation, we must interpret them by the light of the idea which I am now trying to formulate.

I pass on to a fourth conception—corollary I can scarcely call it—which will enable me to rehabilitate reason and consciousness. So far I may have seemed to suggest that the sole function of consciousness is to garner the fruits of the buried life or (like the administrative officials who follow in the wake of a conqueror) to organize the provinces which instinct and intuition have gradually conquered. But consciousness has a deeper meaning than this and a higher function. I

have said that conscious apprehension of a truth implies unconscious apprehension of a higher and wider truth. No doubt it does; but what is the precise meaning of the word "implies"? Would it not be equally correct to say that conscious apprehension of a truth prepares the way for unconscious apprehension of a higher and wider truth, prepares the way for it and makes it possible? The very fact that one has become aware of the knowledge that one possesses is a stimulus to further effort on the part of the unconscious self. For it is a tendency of human nature —a master tendency which operates on every plane of man's being—to be dissatisfied with what has been won and to press on towards the unattained. And so the man who consciously apprehends a fact is already, though he may not know it, dissatisfied with the fact as such. He has already begun to ask himself, in some secret recess of his mind, "What does the fact mean? What is its place and

purpose in Nature? What causes have produced it? What laws does it exemplify?" His mind is already beginning, blindly and gropingly, to feel its way towards the law or wider fact in which the isolated phenomenon is grounded and through which it is explained. So too when a man becomes aware of an emotional idea which has long ruled his heart, in the very act of bringing it under the control of his consciousness, he causes it to draw in from far and near its hidden reserves and supports (that through these it may justify itself to his reason),—to draw these into a region of his sub-conscious life in which it is possible for them to shape themselves, by slow degrees and by a spontaneous process of which he has no cognizance, into new emotional ideas, ready when their turn comes to be transmuted by consciousness into new thoughts. These examples suggest to us that consciousness, by stimulating the subliminal self into ever fresh activity, may well become

one of the most potent of the forces that make for the evolution of the inner life.

We now begin to see a meaning and a purpose in Philosophy. Its dream of consciously knowing the final truth about things is of all dreams the idlest; but it may well be that the soul has sub-conscious knowledge of truths deeper than any that can present themselves to consciousness, and it may well be that Philosophy will help to bring this sub-conscious knowledge to the birth. The true life is a buried life; and the true self is a hidden self. Far down in the "abysmal deeps" of the soul dwells the thing which for each of us is of eternal and transcendent significance,—the genuine faith of the man; the faith which is the inward counterpart of character, the invisible side of personality, the hidden source of spiritual energy; the real attitude of the man towards the world in which he finds himself; the actual, living, ever-changing response made by his soul to

the realities that environ it, that underlie it, that overshadow it, that stream through all the deeper channels of its life. To determine what that response is, is beyond the power of thought, for the reason—one among many—that it is, as I have just said, a living and therefore an ever-changing response; but if we may never hope to know what we really believe, it by no means follows that we are to rest content with our ignorance. To say that all men are equally endowed with faith, and therefore all equally near to the inmost truth of things, would be a glaring misuse of language. It is impossible to define the limits of the individual life as we descend into the depths of the buried self; but it is tolerably certain that the objective presence of spiritual Nature in the soul, however real it may be, does not constitute the man's personality except so far as it is brought into those sub-conscious regions of his life which mediate between the light of his conscious-

ness and the total darkness in which all his attempts to explore himself invariably end. Faith (as I understand the word) differs from faith, just as character differs from character; and the difference between faith and faith is largely determined by the individual's capacity for actualizing the potentialities of faith, or, in other words, for drawing into his own life the waters that rise from those dark reservoirs of spirituality which are the very head-springs of ideal truth. Men are responsible, within certain undefinable limits, for their faith, just as they are responsible for their character; and the reaction of what they think and say and do on what they are is just as inevitable and just as decisive in the one case as in the other. It is the duty of each of us to deepen and purify his faith; and the best, perhaps the only way of doing this is to utilize every opportunity of providing outlets for the imprisoned waters, and so causing a constant current to set from the

deeper sources of spiritual reality in the direction of the individual life.

Now there are three chief outlets for the hidden energies of faith. The first is that of *conduct;* the second is that of *poetry* (or creative art); the third is that of *thought.* Of these three outlets the third alone is of special interest to us in our present inquiry. The great problems of life cannot be solved on the plane of thought, and yet it is our duty to try to think them out. For consciousness is, as we have recently seen, one of the chief means of stimulating the unconscious self into fresh activity. And so, if we wish to deepen and strengthen our faith, if we wish to make it live and grow, one of our first duties is to try to become conscious of it, to get to know (so far as may be possible) what it really is.

To undertake this task is the function of Philosophy. Philosophical speculation is something more than a mere pastime for our

idle hours, something more than a mere game of skill, something more than a mere exercise for our mental muscles. Hopeless though it it and must ever be of any definite issue, involved though it is and must ever be in a logically vicious circle of thought, it is yet by far the most important thing that a man can do with his mind, the thinking part of him; and that, not because of any material result that it will achieve (for it will never achieve any), nor because of any scientific truth that it will reach (for it will never reach any), but because of its salutary reaction, its stimulating influence on the inner life of the soul. For as, when water is pumped up from a deep well, fresh supplies from yet deeper sources come in to take its place; so, when a man's sub-conscious faith is brought within the ken of his consciousness, a yet profounder faith is raised to the sub-conscious level, and the place that this profounder faith has left empty is filled by potencies of spiritual emotion which

are drawn from deeper and darker reservoirs, till the quickening action of consciousness on faith reaches at last to the darkest depths of the inward life. Or as, when clouds are sucked up by the sun from the bosom of the sea, currents are generated which circulate through all the length and breadth of the ocean-world, and descend far into its depths, so the ideas which consciousness distils from the ocean of the "subliminal self" cause, as they ascend into the ether of thought, a continuous stream of sub-conscious movement which is the spiritual life of the soul as surely as complete stagnation is its spiritual death.

To think about great matters with any approach to lucidity is given to very few men. To exercise the gift, if one happens to have been dowered with it, is a high and sacred duty. For, apart from the quickening influence of speculation on the buried life of the Thinker, his thoughts, when systematized and formulated, may well become the means of

helping others to think and, through the medium of thinking, to open new outlets for the imprisoned waters of their faith. Systems of thought, though always valueless as systems, are of immense and inexhaustible value, as providing channels of communication between the mind of the Thinker and the minds of those who are able to respond to his influence. The loneliest sage that ever wore out his life in apparently fruitless meditation was thinking, not for himself alone but for all his fellow men. While he seemed to be weaving mere webs of words, he was really teaching thousands and tens of thousands of men, teaching them, not by the cogency of his logic but by the stimulating influence of his thoughts, to think out the great problems of life, and by so doing to strengthen their souls to solve them.

III.

What do I really believe? is the first and last question which, as a philosopher, I am called upon to answer. As thought is ever reacting upon and modifying feeling, it stands to reason that the very process of my thinking will transform the faith which is the object of my thought. In other words, the very effort that I make to elaborate an answer to my question will make the answer, when given, null and void. This much may be foreseen at the outset; yet it need not deter me from proceeding. In its attempt to solve this personal problem, Philosophy is constrained, by the very stress and bias of things, to become, or try to become, impersonal. What is my real attitude, the real attitude of my true self, towards the world in which I find myself. This attitude, whatever it may be, when con-

sciously realized, will take the form of a general conception of myself and my environment, of an all-embracing "theory of things." How is such a theory to be framed? In part at least by the use of the faculty which frames or helps to frame all theories, the faculty which we call *reason*. If we ask reason to work for us, we must expect it to work in accordance with the laws of its being, we must expect it to follow the methods that happen to be congenial to its nature. Now these methods will be best studied where they work most successfully: and the field in which they work most successfully is unquestionably that of Science. As reason bears itself in Science, so will it bear itself, *mutatis mutandis*, in Philosophy. The essential features of scientific method will be reproduced by reason, when it applies itself to the study of philosophical problems, reproduced just so far as is compatible with the profoundly altered conditions under which it will have to work.

In Philosophy, as in Science, reason will start by assuming that Nature is worthy of the trust that we instinctively repose in her, and will infer from this assumption that the guarantee of Nature is the ultimate criterion of truth. What it is my nature to perceive, that I do and must perceive. What it is my nature to believe, that I do and must believe. Here we come to the bedrock on which reason builds all its structures, and from which it quarries all its materials.

In Philosophy, as in Science, reason will be inspired and guided by faith in the essential unity of Nature, and by the derivative conviction that universality, whether actual or potential, is the proof of naturalness, and therefore the penultimate criterion of truth. But the search for unity, which is so congenial to reason, will for obvious reasons take a widely different form in philosophy from what it takes in science. The student of physical nature has to deal with what are

vulgarly called objective facts. These are his materials, and in these he tries to discover the underlying and unifying network of causes and laws. The student of inward nature has to deal with feelings and expressions of feeling which are as changeable and evanescent as the clouds on an April day; and his work is to discover the hidden reality of which these, as they shift and pass, are the transient forms and undecipherable symbols. The physicist begins with certainty even when he begins with doubt; for though (to take an example) he may not be able to explain why the lawn is wet after a clear and cloudless night, he is quite certain that there is dew on the grass. The universal element in perception is ready to his hand; and so he can give his mind to the work of discovering the universal element or elements in the things that he perceives. The thinker can never hope to escape from the task of searching for the universal element in the inward expe-

riences, in the spiritual perceptions of mankind. Where the physicist begins, he aspires to end, with that subjective universality which provides the basis of certainty on which all the structures of science are built. But in truth he has never done with beginning. The depths of the inner life are unfathomable; and in his attempt to explore them he is ever laying foundations on which he will never be able to build.

But, however hopeless may be the search for universality in belief, it will have to be made. Indeed it is clear from what has just been said, that when reason undertakes the task which I have set it, the task of determining the real tendencies of my own inner life, its first assumption—that Nature is the fountain of truth—will at once have to be reinforced and even interpreted by its second assumption,—that universality is the proof and measure of Nature. What it is my nature to believe that I do and must believe;

and if I could but ascertain what I really am, I should be in possession of ideal truth, or of so much of it as it is possible for me to assimilate. But how am I to distinguish the real from the apparent tendencies of my inner life? How am I to find out what Nature sanctions me in believing or (shall I say?) constrains me to believe? Evidently, if I am to follow, at however great a distance, the lead of Science, by determining the universal element in faith. I must try to discover the lineaments of that vital and essential humanity which, when brought within the scope (so far as that is possible) of my individual being, makes me what I really am. I must try to read myself through the medium of my kind.

Now there are two ways and two only of searching for the universal element in things. We must try to determine either their greatest common measure of differential actuality, or what I may provisionally call their com-

mon ideal. It will be found that the greatest common measure of actuality in similar things is, as a rule, but one degree removed from nothing, and that the greatest common measure of differential actuality is, as a rule, exactly nothing. More especially is this the case when we deal with the phenomena of life. Let us take the case of a hundred peaches, in various stages of development, from the hard green excrescence which has but just shed its bloom up to the ripe and luscious fruit. What have these in common? Actually, nothing. Potentially, the perfection of peach-hood. The universal element in them is the type which all exemplify, the ideal which all are striving to realize. So, again,—to pass to a higher level of life—if we were to examine all the poems that had been written since the world began, with a view to determining what poetry really is, we should have to admit that their greatest common measure of differential actuality was

exactly nothing, and that what was really common to them all was the ideal which they had striven in their several ways to realize,—an ideal, the nature of which could best be ascertained by studying the acknowledged masterpieces of song.

As it is with peaches and with poems, so it is with those inward and spiritual phenomena which Philosophy seeks to interpret. Here, indeed, the idea of finding a common measure of actuality must be abandoned at the very outset. In the region of the inner life, with its ceaseless ferment of spiritual forces, there is no actuality. Everything is ἐν γενέσει, in process of development. It is the greatest common measure of potentiality that we need to determine; and the search for this will as certainly carry us towards infinity—the infinity of unattainable perfection—as the search for the greatest common measure of actuality will carry us towards zero. If peaches, in their various stages of

development, have nothing in common but the potentiality of ideal peach-hood ; if poems, of all sorts and kinds, have nothing in common but the potentiality of ideal or perfect poetry ; does it not follow, *a fortiori*, that there is nothing common to the various faiths of men except the ideal which all are struggling to realize, and by which all are animated and sustained? The faith of the best of men is an imperfect embodiment of this ideal. The faith of the average man is but an embryonic form of it. The faith of the most degraded of men is its apparently lifeless seed. But it is itself in all faiths, from lowest to highest, as surely as the peach-nature, with all its possibilities of sweetness and beauty, is in all peaches, from the least developed to the most mature.

Here then, as elsewhere, and here if nowhere else, that universal element in things which is the proof of Nature, and as such the counterpart of reality and truth, is the ideal.

To determine what I do believe, what the real faith of my soul is, is to determine what I ought to believe. In trying to determine this, reason, whose function is to introduce unity into multiplicity and order into chaos, will be undertaking a congenial task. For here, as elsewhere, and here if nowhere else, the ideal is the unifying and organizing element in things, the all-pervading bond of kinship, the paramount principle of harmony and order.

The search for what is universal in faith transforms itself at the outset into the search for ideal faith. I have already pointed out that faith, when consciously realized, becomes a quasi-philosophical conception, a quasi-theory of the Universe. If this be so, then the search for ideal faith, when undertaken by reason, must needs become a search for nothing less than the true "theory of things," the ideal goal of all speculative thought.

But how is such a theory to be evolved?

Can we hope to reproduce in philosophy those inductive processes of Science by which theories are distilled from experience? I think not. In Science induction is practicable because physical phenomena are the same, *quâ phenomena*, for all who perceive them. But in philosophy the facts that offer themselves for our investigation—the leading phenomena of man's inward and spiritual life—will tell us *nothing*, will have no definite phenomenal existence, until we have begun to interpret them; and it is only by the light of our general conception of Nature that we can attempt to interpret them. Moreover, in our search for the ideal element in faith, we must follow the phenomena of human faith inward and inward into that darkness of the buried life which is the ultimate source of ideal truth. And this means that we must turn our backs on them *quâ phenomena*, always preferring the unconscious to the conscious testimony of the human soul, and

always ignoring outward facts until they have yielded up their inner meaning, which, of course, they will not begin to do (for each man in turn must wrest their meaning from them) until we have studied them from the standpoint of our own dominant conceptions.

Even in Science the inductive processes are, as a rule, greatly abridged by the use that is made of hypotheses. The part that imagination plays in scientific investigation has not been ignored by the students of scientific method, but I doubt if full justice has ever been done to it. The experience and the imagination of the physicist are ever acting and reacting on one another. From first to last he selects, arranges, and studies his facts by the light of the successive hypotheses which his experience of the facts suggests to his mind. These hypotheses may or may not be consciously realized; it is probable that many of them have but a subconscious existence; but their work is not

the less effective because it is carried on for the most part in secret.

This feature of scientific method is, I think, the very Alpha and Omega of philosophic method, its starting point, its road, and its goal. Disguise it from ourselves as we may, a system of thought is nothing but an expanded and elaborated guess. The personality of the thinker—itself an aboriginal and inalienable assumption—controls the whole movement of his thought and predetermines its ultimate issue. The genesis of his master-hypothesis is a subtle and complicated process, the steps in which cannot be set forth with any approach to precision, while the part that reason actually plays in it is wrapped in inscrutable mystery. To put forward one's "theory of things" as a conclusion rather than an assumption, to pretend to have generalized it from experience, to have evolved it from the observation and investigation of appropriate facts, would savour either

of dishonesty or of self-deception. Not for a moment are we to ignore the salient facts of our spiritual life. Confronting us, as they do, at every turn, these facts will not suffer us to ignore them; and, if we are wise, we shall make them the objects, if not of scientific study, then of lifelong meditation. But we must not flatter ourselves that we have logically "gathered" from them the very theory of life, the very way of looking at things which has made them what they are —to us. It is not by furnishing us with the data for any quasi-scientific process of induction that these inward phenomena help us to frame our theories of things, but by actually influencing our thoughts and feelings. That in the movement of our inner life there is something of the nature of an induction from the facts that environ it is more than probable; but the process is so wholly instinctive and unconscious, so entirely under the control of the secret and quasi-objective logic of Nature,

that the name of induction, with its scientific associations, cannot well be applied to it.

When a hypothesis has been framed its worth has to be tested. How is this done? By seeing how it works. Can this feature of scientific method be reproduced in Philosophy? Consciously to reproduce it is impracticable, as impracticable and, if attempted, as delusive, as the reproduction in Philosophy of the inductive processes of Science. If we draw deductions from our "theory of things," and then try to prove that these are borne out by experience, we lay ourselves open to the charge of having interpreted our facts by the light of the very hypothesis which we are asking them to substantiate. As for testing a philosophical theory experimentally,—the man who frames such a theory can, if he pleases, live by it and see how it works: but this experimental test will have no scientific value; for, however convincing it may be to

the experimenter, it is in the main too inward, too subjective, to appeal to anyone but him; and so far as it does produce perceptible results, these will suggest different conclusions to, and will even be referred to different causes by, different minds. That one's theory of life is subjected to a searching test in the buried life of the soul can scarcely be doubted; but the steps in this process cannot be traced nor its correctness (in the logical sense of the word) determined. Yet the process has an issue, and one the meaning of which cannot easily be mistaken. Give your theory to that sub-conscious part of you from which your reason professed to distil it: let your heart and soul live with it and brood over it and try to assimilate it, and they will test its worth. Reason has evolved the theory by helping the individual soul to become conscious of its faith, by helping it to read itself and interpret itself through the medium of sympathy with and insight into the "general

heart of man." And reason must test the theory by referring it back to the individual soul. Reason must say to the soul, "Are you content with this? Do you rest in it? Is it really yours?" And, having asked these questions, reason must help the soul to answer them. For here again the individual soul must try to read itself, under the guidance of reason, through the medium of the souls of others. When it verifies the theory that is submitted to it, when it asks, "Does this content me?" it must as far as possible universalize itself, it must take Humanity into partnership with itself, it must feel the "general heart" beating in its own.

Reason, then, must verify the hypotheses of the thinker; but only as the agent and interpreter of the thinker's own inner life. It must not dream of subjecting them to any special or quasi-professional tests of its own. It must not expect them to be *rational*, in the narrower sense of the word. It must not

require them to have been logically deduced from self-evident premises, or logically induced from indisputable facts. Its business is to help the soul to test them by its own secret, subtle, assimilative methods, and to accept or reject them according as they have satisfied or failed to satisfy the demands and desires of man's inmost self. It is in this way and no other that reason can judge of their merits. By dying to itself as reason it will live again in that inner life which it has quickened and strengthened just so far as it has helped it to know itself. For as it advances into that shadowy region, it gradually assimilates to itself the insight and imagination of the life which it explores. In other words, the distinction between the rational and emotional sides of man's nature, between reason and faith, gradually effaces itself, and out of the fusion of these apparent opposites emerges the higher unity of the indivisible soul. This—the soul, the whole

inner being of man—is the supreme Court of Appeal in philosophy. A true theory of life is one which satisfies the paramount needs of man's inner nature, one which the soul of man can embrace and draw into itself and make its own. And the final proof of the theory being true is that it is entirely re-absorbed into those ocean depths of unconscious spirituality, in which truth loses itself in reality, and from which (if the theory is true, and just so far as it is true) it originally came. The fierce light of consciousness is ever distilling a haze of thought from the great sea of the "*vie profonde*"; but sooner or later (if it has really come from that sea, and is no mere mirage of the thinker's brain) the haze will condense into feeling, and return, as a stream of emotion, to its eternal source.

As is the test to which the theorist looks forward, such, in its broad outlines, should be the theory which he is preparing for verification. When a physicist is framing a hypo-

thesis he always looks forward, perhaps half unconsciously, to the tests that it will have to undergo; and his design in framing it is to enable it to stand those tests and emerge unscathed from their ordeal. Something akin to this should take place in high thinking. When the thinker is feeling his way towards his master conception of life and Nature, he should keep steadily in view the searching test that the conception will have to undergo when he submits it to the judgment of his inner life. He must say to himself, if not in words, then in thoughts that lie deeper than words: "However my theory of things may be evolved and whatever form it may take, one thing about it is clear: it must give satisfaction, or at any rate provide for satisfaction being given, to those master desires with which Nature—the nature that is truly mine because I share it with all men—with which Nature, in and through the evolution of her own master tendencies, has inspired my heart."

IV.

We are now able to set Philosophy a distinct and definite task. If a philosophical theory is to be regarded as true or false according as it is accepted or rejected by the general heart and soul of man, then it is certain that the final function of Philosophy is, not to search for abstract truth but to minister on the plane of conscious thought to the latent optimism in which the life, not of man alone but of all living things, is securely rooted. The dream of the thinker is to see things from the standpoint of the true self, of the ideal man. But what is the true self? As the being of man is still in process of development, we must endeavour, by ascertaining its central tendencies, to determine the law of its growth or, in the language of mathematics, the equation to its

curve; and in order to ascertain its central tendencies, we must study its dominant desires. There is no other field in which the real movement of human nature can be so clearly traced. A natural desire is the conscious or semi-conscious realization of a natural bias; and a natural bias is generated by the strain of natural forces, operating in a certain direction and with a certain measure of persistence and strength. Ignoring, as we have every right to do, those elements in desire which are morbid, or local, or temporary, or otherwise exceptional, we are justified in saying that all our desires, from lowest to highest, have arisen in response to Nature's hints, and in the course of our effort to utilize her resources and adapt ourselves to her facts and laws. And as it has been, so it always will be. It is through the medium of desire that man—like every other organism—keeps open his communications with his own ideal, the attractive force of which is the mainspring

of his highest energies and the counterpart of his highest aims. It is through the medium of desire that the ideal invites us to pursue it; and as the germ of the ideal which is in every heart struggles to evolve itself, our desires are the growing pains that bear witness to its eternal effort to live. If the aim of the thinker is to see things as the ideal man sees them, then it is well that he should submit his "guesses at truth" to the judgment of the heart's desires; for these are not merely the heralds of the ideal's advent but the actual influx of its dawning light.

That the theory of things which provides for the satisfaction of the heart's desires is bound to be optimistic, in the best sense of the word, is a self-evident truth. Desire is always a movement towards what seems to be good. Indeed it is only in terms of desire that the word *good* will allow itself to be defined; for it is only in response to the stress and pressure of desire that the idea of good

has evolved and shaped itself in our minds. To debate the question of Nature's goodness is therefore an impertinence,—the outcome of an inextricable confusion of thought. What right have we to bring the totality of things under the category of goodness when our own conceptions of what is good have ever been and will ever be subordinate to and dependent on those central movements of desire in and through which Nature discloses to us her secrets and announces to us her will? But we need not trouble ourselves to expose the fallacies of pessimism. The necessity of optimism is, in the last resort, physical, not logical. In the use that I have made of the word *faith* I may have seemed to prejudge this vital question, but I used the word because I could not help myself, because there was no other word that could take its place. Wherever there is life there is desire, and wherever there is desire there is trust. In this dual feeling—dual, because desire without trust is

wholly ineffective, while trust without desire is purely passive—we come to what is aboriginal and protoplasmic in man's attitude towards the world in which he finds himself. From the least of plants up to the greatest of men all living things are incurable optimists. Nature has already convinced us, as she has convinced all living things, has convinced us in the secret recesses of our souls, that life is worth living. The highest achievement of Philosophy is to convince our minds of the same fundamental truth. And this will prove to be no easy task. For trust in Nature, when consciously accepted and realized, discloses in itself inexhaustible potentialities of hope and joy, and, in order to justify these to the mind that discerns them, demands from reason a theory of things so daringly optimistic that not this world and this life only, but all the realms and phases of existence, shall be transfigured by the glow of its triumphant faith.

Philosophy then is in its essence a search for an optimistic explanation of life. That there are pessimists among thinkers as well as among ordinary men is undeniable, but the fact does not disconcert me. The philosophy that originates in a pessimistic sentiment and ends in a pessimistic theory is, on its own showing, an enterprise which has miscarried, an expedition which has gone astray. For the presence of doubt and despair shows that the heart is dissatisfied with its outlook on life, and is seeking, perhaps unknown to itself, for spiritual help and comfort; and the thinker who, instead of dissipating its gloom, does but intensify it, has evidently failed to fulfil his mission,—failed because he never told himself what his mission really was. The chief reason why the enterprises of Philosophy so often and so grievously miscarry is that from the very outset they are aimless ventures, those who organize them having never consciously realized what it is that they are striving to

discover. The first and most decisive stage in the speculative movement of the mind will have been successfully accomplished when the thinker has convinced himself that his business is to seek for a world-embracing conception which shall right all wrongs, heal all wounds, disperse all clouds, make all rough places smooth, satisfy all our higher desires, fulfil all our nobler dreams, give us "in limitless floods" the light towards which we instinctively turn,—to seek for this, assuming at the outset that this explanation of life, and no other, is *true*.

For with this goal before him it becomes possible for the thinker to map out the earlier stages of his road. He must begin by assuming that happiness is man's ideal destiny, and that the light of ideal goodness and beauty burns at the heart of Nature. He must then devise a theory of things which will bring the admitted facts of existence into harmony with these hypothetical truths.

He will of course interpret the admitted facts of existence by the aid of his optimistic faith. Consciously or unconsciously, he must read his own prejudices and postulates into the facts that he studies; and, that being so, it is well that he should deliberately read into them a postulate which he has deliberately accepted and made his own. It is (as we have seen) by his subjective interpretation of the great facts that confront him that each man in turn makes them what they are—to him. In every spiritual phenomenon there is a residuum of what, for want of a fitter phrase, I may perhaps call objective fact. But we must always carefully distinguish between this residuum of fact and those subjective interpretations of it which we are so often called upon to accept as objectively true. For example, that there is moral evil in the world is a fact. That "the heart of man is desperately wicked" is a subjective interpretation of this fact. That evil is only

"good in the making" is a subjective interpretation of a widely different character. That there is suffering in the world is a fact. That "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together" is one interpretation of this fact. That this is an unjust and cruel world is another. That pain purifies the heart and expands the soul is a third. That death is the end of man's bodily life on earth is a fact. That death "is the end of life" is one interpretation of this fact. That death is the "usherer into heavenly mansions" is another. That beyond death there is a "grand peut-être" is a third. In each of these cases the idiosyncrasy of the thinker enters into quasi-chemical combination with the fact which he contemplates, and transforms it into a subjective fact to which (in all probability) he unconsciously ascribes objective existence.

What is the thinker to do if the admitted facts of existence seem to give the lie to his optimism? He must take pains to show

that they do not give the lie to it, that their antagonism to it is apparent, not real. This or that interpretation of this or that fact may contradict his primary postulate; but the darker facts of existence are, *quâ* objective facts, finite and actual; and as his faith directs itself towards the infinite and the ideal, there can be no lasting controversy between their darkness and its light. His faith therefore must coalesce with the facts that seem to be at war with it; and while it disarms their hostility and brings light into their darkness, it will itself be strengthened and widened, it will be transformed into its own true self, by the very effort that it makes to assimilate their meaning to its own. With this end in view, the thinker will try to frame a conception of life and Nature, so large and all-embracing that there will be room and to spare within its illimitable limits for man's darker experiences to harmonize with his brightest hopes; so subtle and all-pervading

that it will disarm opposition, not by sweeping aside the obstacles that confront it but by interpenetrating them and passing beyond them. He will try to convince us that sin and suffering are only incidents in the development of mighty forces,—forces which need for their full and final evolution a boundless arena and an immeasurable range of time. Or, he will so construct in thought the master curve of existence, that after leading up to and passing through the points of sin and suffering, it will, in obedience to the law of its own movement, pass on in the direction of ideal good. In order to ensure that the natural evolution of the curve shall carry it towards this infinitely distant goal, he may find it necessary to make it pass through imaginary points,—points which lie beyond the actual, and, as far as we can see at present, the possible range of our experience. If such points are needed, they must be provided. The philosophy that fails to use the

wings of imagination will not go far. If the thinker finds that purely imaginative hypotheses are needed for the elaboration of his theory of things, he must not hesitate to supply them. If, for example, he finds it necessary to extend the range of life beyond its apparent limits, let him extend it freely and fearlessly. If he finds it necessary to postulate the immortality or the pre-existence of the soul, let him boldly do so. If he finds it necessary to assume that he is as free as he feels himself to be, let him, in the strength of this feeling, break through the flimsy webs of question-begging arguments in which Necessism is ever striving to entangle his mind. If he finds it necessary to assume that there are other planes of existence than the physical world, let him make the assumption without a moment's hesitation. He will of course put forward no hypothesis which can possibly be disproved ; and if he is wise he will not labour over-sedu-

lously to prove what is unprovable, and what, as it happens, he is free to assume. To wait obsequiously on facts is the rôle of Science, not of Philosophy. The thinker who refuses to go beyond facts confines his energies to regions from which he is always liable to be expelled as an intruder. Philosophy has as much in common with Poetry as with Science. If it is to borrow something of aim and method from the latter, let it borrow some measure of imagination from the former. It is only by swinging to and fro between Science and Poetry, by refusing to surrender to the attractive force of either, that Philosophy can remain true to itself.

Am I serious when I say that optimism is the end and imagination the way of speculative thought? Yes, quite serious. For what is our alternative? The pseudo-scientific pursuit of abstract truth. Philosophy must aim at giving satisfaction either to the whole man—the real, living, many-sided self

—in which case it will end by becoming optimistic and imaginative; or to the merely logical self, in which case it will end by pursuing a shadow through a maze of meaningless words. It must make its choice between the desires of the heart and the figments of the brain, between the imagination that goes far beyond facts and the verbal ingenuity that travels far wide of them. Knowing, as he needs must do, that the inductive and experimental processes of Science are out of place in Philosophy, the thinker is prone to indulge in the dream of reaching pure truth by drawing correct inferences from indisputable premises. But of all dreams this is the vainest. To begin with, there are no indisputable premises in Philosophy. What is indisputable for one man, is doubtful for another, meaningless for a third, incredible for a fourth. The personal element is sure to assert itself, and cannot possibly be eliminated. And even if one could start from

premises as to the truth of which there was a general consensus of opinion, it would be useless to deal with these premises syllogistically unless one could find some medium of expression other than that of human speech. For words are not mathematical symbols, and it is idle to deal with them as if they were. In arguments which advance, as philosophical arguments so often do, through a series of "therefores" from plausible premises to logically sound conclusions, there is always a serious risk of the words that are used diverging, as they pass from context to context, from their original sense, with the result that they become less and less adequate to the things that they name, and less and less faithful to the experiences that they are supposed to express; and when once this process of divergence has begun, each step that the thinker takes will widen the gap between symbol and reality, until at last, when he reaches the goal of demonstrated truth, the

conclusion that confronts him will prove to be as hollow as a dream. If a thought is be logically developed, it must start by being—what no high thought can possibly be—flawlessly true: the least taint of imperfection will spread so rapidly in the atmosphere of the syllogism that, long before the argument has reached its conclusion, the heart of the thought will have been eaten away, and what was once a living idea will have been changed into a husk of empty words. Against this danger—the deadliest that besets the path of speculation—there is but one effectual safeguard. The thinker must submit all his conclusions—his subsidiary conceptions, as well as his dominant convictions—to the test of feeling. He must ask himself again and again, "Do I feel the truth of this proposition? Can I really see a meaning in it? Does it satisfy the requirements of that deeper reason which is emotional rather than intellectual, and which has

a logic of its own of whose processes I can give no account? In fine, does it appeal to my heart?" The regeneration of physical science dates from the time when men began to realize that scientific theories — logical deductions from verbal premises—count for nothing when they conflict with the evidence (direct or indirect) of the bodily senses. If Philosophy is ever to be regenerated, men will have to convince themselves that philosophical theories count for nothing when they conflict with the evidence—the genuine evidence—of spiritual emotion. The logical flow of words, however plausible it may be, suffers inevitable defeat the moment it meets the counter current of a natural tendency,—

"The central stream of what men feel indeed."

I have suggested that perpetual oscillation between the opposite poles of Poetry and Science constitutes the very life-pulse of Philosophy. If this be so, then the appeal to the heart for the verification of its theories

is as vital a part of the work of Philosophy as is the appeal to reason for the solution of its problems. The swing back towards emotion, towards personality, towards Poetry, is the very counterpart of the swing forward towards reason, towards impersonality, towards Science. Each movement implies and demands the other. The Philosophy that cannot swing back towards Poetry has evidently succumbed to the attractive force of Science, and in doing so has ceased to be itself.

V.

And now for my answer to our unanswerable question. Philosophy, as I understand the word, is a systematic attempt—personal in its inception but ever tending to become impersonal—to interpret and present to consciousness the real faith, the real attitude towards things in general, of a man's inmost self. The attempt is made by imagination,—introspective, sympathetic, and in the last resort constructive—working under the general supervision of reason. All world-embracing ideas originate in the heart—in the emotional side of man's inner life,—and all world-embracing theories must be referred back to the heart for approval. The value of the effort of thinking is that it quickens the inner life, bringing its deeper and therefore more uni-

versal elements within the compass of the man's personality, and thereby rendering the heart, at the end of the process of thinking, a more competent judge of any theory that may be submitted to it than it was before the process began. The thinker starts with his own individuality; but the very effort that he makes to become conscious of this compels him to universalize it, compels him to find, or try to find, the general heart in his own. As the heart turns towards the light of ideal good, as naturally and inevitably as plants turn towards the light of the sun, it is clear that no theory can permanently content it which does not bring light into its life,—not indeed the blinding light of the ideal, but the promise of its advent, the light of a far-reaching and world-illuminating hope. From this position I, for one, pass on to what is for me the conclusion of the whole matter, namely,—that *the function of Philosophy is to interpret and justify to man's*

reason the unconquerable optimism of his heart.

I shall be told that all this simply means that I, for one, am an incurable and impenitent optimist. Perhaps it does; but even if it means no more than this, it means a great deal—to me. For the lifelong effort that I have made to lift my faith into the light of consciousness and to transform it first into a comprehensive theory of things and then into a master principle of action,—this effort, though otherwise barren of result, has so deepened and widened the flood of my faith, so quickened its current, so stimulated its intercourse with the mysterious fountains that feed it, that, through the channel which my thoughts have provided for it, it now overflows into my life in strongly pulsing waves of hope and joy.

I am not an adept at Philosophy. I am not even a serious student of it. I belong to no school. I can pronounce no shibboleth.

My attempt to think out the great problems of life has been in the highest degree informal, unscientific, unprofessional, untechnical; but, such as it is, it has always been to me "its own exceeding great reward."

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